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ABSTRACT

A rhetorical analysis procedure assists upper-division students in any academic field to learn how to read, interpret, and evaluate disciplinary arguments, and how to communicate this thoroughly and thoughtfully in a well integrated essay. In a warm-up exercise, the class discusses a representative article, research study, or essay in the discipline. Students also write an abstract of the article and compare it to the author's abstract, if one exists. In the main part of the activity, students read two articles chosen by the instructor that represent opposing sides on a major issue in the field. Students write abstracts of the articles and, using guidelines provided, evaluate the merits of the opposing arguments. Students then choose to support one side or the other in a five to seven page paper. Students must incorporate into their papers two or three carefully chosen direct quotes, two paraphrases, and three secondary sources. In so doing, they work on gracefully introducing a quote and an indirect quote and paraphrasing without plagiarizing. (Guidelines for reading, evaluating, and writing about the articles are attached.) (RS)

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ED 377 519

Controlled Research: Putting Text to the Test

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This presentation describes a rhetorical analysis in which upper division majors in any academic field can learn

1. how to read, interpret, and evaluate disciplinary arguments (critical thinking and writing); and

2. how to communicate this thoroughly and thoughtfully in a well integrated essay.

In one nested analytical project a number of important cognitive skills are mobilized: the ability to read and think critically, the ability to summarize complex points of view, and the ability to analyze the merits of an argument on the basis of empirical, definitional, rational, theoretical, and/or anecdotal bases.

Students also practice writing informative and descriptive abstracts, documenting primary and secondary sources, and learning methods for avoiding plagiarism. Yet, they work with a maximum of only three articles.

The obvious benefit to instructors is that restricting students' sources simplifies evaluating for critical thinking, and accuracy of quotations, paraphrases, summaries, intratextual citations, end or footnotes, references, and so on.

Procedure

Warm-Up

1. The instructor identifies one representative article, research study, or essay in the discipline, preferably with an abstract. The abstract is temporarily removed, as is any information about the source of the article. Students read the article, discuss it with respect to the matters of claims, assumptions, definitions, quality of reasoning, detail, organization, diction level/tone, and so on. They distinguish between informative and descriptive abstracts and write their own abstract--informative, descriptive,

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or both.[1] If the author has written an abstract, they then compare theirs to that of the author.

Project

2. The instructor identifies a major issue in the field, about which there are clearly defined differences of opinion as stated in two opposing articles. (For example, in the social sciences I use the issue of cognition versus affect where the two sharply antagonistic camps argue for primacy.)

The articles must have references, and abstracts are preferred, but not essential. If abstracts precede the articles, they are temporarily removed along with any information as to the source of the selected articles. As before, students read both pieces carefully. They write abstracts for each, assuming the persona of the author and practicing the "person" or voice appropriate to the field and/or journal. If abstracts appeared originally with the work, a comparison is again made between the students' abstracts and those of the authors.

Then, using the attached guideline, students evaluate the merits of the opposing arguments:

1. what each side claims; and
2: how effectively each side supports it.

Students assess the trustworthiness of the material and assess the nature and quality of the evidence: the sponsoring organization, the procedures used to determine/yield the data, the assumptions, the reasoning, the material itself, the proportion of text given over to any particular subtopic, the stylistic differences, and the conclusions.

Writing Assignment

Students choose to support one side or the other in a paper of n pages (I find that 5 to 7 doublespaced pages is generally adequate.), explaining why that particular viewpoint is the more reasonable, sound, accurate, in short, a stronger, more convincing statement. Students now receive the actual citations of the two articles and must reference them on their Work Cited page.

However, the assignment carries with it these caveats:

1. Students may use only the two articles themselves for direct evidence. They may not go to any other texts listed in the Works Cited. But they can (and must) use only the citations themselves as secondary sources. In

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[1]Bazerman, Charles. The Informative Writer. 4th. ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992.

my particular case I also ask students to take the APA references and convert them into MLA.

2. They must incorporate into their papers

1.) 2 to 3 carefully chosen direct quotes
2.) 2 paraphrases and
3.) 3 secondary sources.

(In so doing, they work on gracefully introducing a quote and an indirect quote and paraphrasing without plagiarizing.)

This project can be undertaken intensively or more leisurely, interspersed with other activities over several weeks.

Controlled Research: Rhetorical Analysis

1. Read the essay through at least twice; then answer these questions about what the writer is doing in the essay:

   A. Rhetorical situation and context

      1. What is the nature of the readers (reconstruct from internal or external evidence)?
      2. What were the time, place, and occasion of publication (check the original)?
      3. What historical background or other matters of context are relevant?
      4. What is the primary purpose of the essay? Any secondary purposes?
      5. What is thesis, stated or implied?
      6. What does the writer assume about the knowledge and attitude of the reader? How do you know?

   B. Strategies and evidence

      1. How does the writer establish his or her reliability and trustworthiness?
      2. What principle of structure or organization is at work in the essay?
      3. What is the function of each paragraph in terms of the thesis and purpose of the essay?
      4. Where does the writer employ logical, ethical, and emotional arguments?
      5. What kinds of evidence are used?
      6. Does the writer acknowledge or seem to understand the other side of the argument? Where?
      7. Is there evidence missing? Has the writer used faulty reasoning or inappropriate emotional appeals?

   C. Style

      1. Describe the writer's voice, or tone. Is it appropriate to the rhetorical situation?
      2. Describe any special techniques that contribute to the writer's style: unusual syntax, rhetorical questions, effective parallel structures, repetitions, metaphors and similes, unusual vocabulary.

2. Decide what elements of the essay are distinctive. Then write an essay about <u>how</u> the essay tries to achieve its purpose. Organize your essay, using the evidence to show how and why the writer made various choices, how the parts of the essay work together, and how effective the choices are.

Controlled Research

Take a stand on the primacy of affect or cognition. In order to convince your readers that Lazarus or Zajonc holds the preferred point of view, analyze both pieces to show how the position you oppose uses unconvincing or inappropriate techniques to argue its point, while the position you support uses reasonable and more believable evidence. Use only the testimony cited in the articles.

The purpose of this paper is to see if you can:

1. quote directly
2. paraphrase
3. document primary and secondary sources
4. avoid plagiarizing and
5. say something meaningful of your own at the same time

To do:

1. Give your paper a title.

2. Support your stand with no more than

   a. two judicious direct quotations from each author

   b. 2 paraphrases from each author

   c. 3 significant secondary sources.

3. Remember that your paraphrased sections must be documented. (In the margin, please also note the paragraph each section came from.)

4. Use MLA style for formatting your text (title, subheads--should you choose to use them), intratextual documentation, and references.

5. Limit your paper to 4 or 5 pages.